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# **THE MANHATTAN WATERFRONT**

## **Prospects and Problems**

**April, 1965**

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THE MANHATTAN WATERFRONT  
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April, 1965



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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

New York's waterfront is the City's most priceless natural resource. But the true value of the waterfront lies not merely in its existence, but additionally in the use that is made of it. Nowhere has this been truer than in Manhattan where the intensive use of the East River and the Hudson River port activities provided the basis for the City's emergence as a great metropolis.

The waterways surrounding Manhattan are an integral part of myriad activities that characterize New York City. Water-oriented commerce, industry, recreation, housing, circulation--all of these are interwoven into the fabric that is New York City.

Because the City is an ever-changing, dynamic entity, the need is always present for careful assessment and review of the functioning of, and relationships between, the varied elements. In its report on The Port of New York, the City Planning Commission dealt with the Manhattan waterfront from the Battery to 72 Street on the Hudson River, and from the Battery to the Manhattan bridge on the East River. This memo considers the entire Manhattan waterfront in terms of prospects and problems. Based upon reconnaissance of the Manhattan waterfront by car, by tug, by helicopter, and by that most reliable of research vehicles--foot, this memo reviews what is actually on the waterfront and indicates the prospects and problems that various segments of the waterfront present.



In addition to the proposals made in the Port Report, which will be discussed subsequently, there are definite opportunities for change to meet new conditions and new demands. However, an important conclusion resulting from this study is that significantly fewer opportunities exist for change than is customarily believed. These opportunities may be summarized as follows:

Short-run or high priority

Hudson River

Chelsea - recreational pier

Chelsea - TV studio

37 to 43 Streets - recreational purposes and improved facilities  
for sightseeing ships

43 to 57 Streets - superliner terminal

125 Street - recreational pier

Dyckman Street - recreational facilities

East River

20 to 26 Streets - housing

Medium-run or medium priority

Hudson River

Battery to Chambers Street - residential, commercial and  
recreational uses

Chambers to West Houston Street - possibly residential

East River

125 to 131 Streets - mixed uses

Battery to Jackson Street - residential commercial and  
recreational uses





Long-run or low priority

Hudson River

West Houston to 14 Streets - possible dual use

57 to 72 Streets - park and marina

Harlem River

Broadway to Dyckman Street - housing

East River

116 to 119 Streets - housing

@ 72 Street - housing

@ 39 Street - housing

14 Street - housing

Regardless of the nature of the opportunity, one basic element must always remain constant, and that is that any decision, whether for housing, for recreation or for any other purpose, must be reached against the background of City-wide considerations, against the City's resources and capabilities, against its strategy and priorities. Within this framework, decisions can be made which will best serve present as well as future needs.

For purposes of this study the Manhattan waterfront has been divided into six major segments beginning at the Battery and moving clockwise around the Island. Several of these segments are further divided, and each of these component areas is described and evaluated.



I. BATTERY TO WEST 72 STREET

Only two of the five miles of waterfront in this segment are actively used for deep-sea pier operation. One mile of waterfront is used for passenger ship operations, and a second mile for general cargo shipping. A third mile is used for railroad lighterage, car float and ferry operations. Service facilities or obsolete and vacant piers occupy the remaining two miles. This critical segment of the waterfront has been studied in depth by both the Department of Marine and Aviation and the Department of City Planning. This five-mile stretch possesses considerable potential, not only for revitalization of the port function but for housing, recreation and ancillary uses where port activities are no longer appropriate because of changing times and technology.

A. Downtown Manhattan - Battery to Chambers Street

As stated in the Port Report, this section of waterfront should be redeveloped with commercial, residential and recreational uses as remaining waterfront uses are gradually phased out. A tremendous potential exists to complement the renewal of the Financial District and to give further enhancement to this vital section of the City. The development of the World Trade Center and of the Washington Market Area, while not dependent upon treatment of the waterfront, give added impetus to the desirability of waterfront development. In terms of City-wide needs and considerations, however, we believe this to be a lower priority area for commitment of public resources. Should development proceed here,



we believe that it would be in the best interests of the City to have it as entirely un-subsidized. Slim residential towers, an expanse of waterfront park easily accessible and open to all, and the provision of a full range of ancillary uses such as restaurants, stores, entertainment and recreational uses and other activities, carefully related to the upland both functionally and aesthetically, are vital elements in the realization of the full potential of this area. Continuing control of the land should reside in the City through a long-term lease arrangement instead of selling the land.

This vital section of the waterfront will be studied as part of the on-going study of Lower Manhattan. Specific recommendations for appropriate development together with an indication of desirable timing will result from the consultants' studies. In the meantime an imaginative and sweeping proposal made by a private sponsor should be encouraged and discussed in further detail within the framework enunciated above and in keeping with the consultants' recommendations as they emerge.

B. Chambers to West Houston Street

The existing pattern of non-residential development adjacent to this area of waterfront, its proximity to the Holland Tunnel and its potentially strategic location in relation to the proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway are compelling arguments for the retention of this area for continued cargo and freight handling activities.



A strong possibility exists, however, that the Washington Market Urban Renewal Project may be developed for a dual use involving some residential component as well as non-residential uses as earlier proposed. Should this be the case, the redevelopment of the waterfront for residential purposes assumes new dimension since one of the major initial considerations against housing in the Washington Market site is its locational divorcement from any adjacent residential community and the inability to provide for a self-sufficient community with all of the necessary amenities and required facilities. Residential redevelopment of the waterfront might consequently be more of a necessity than merely a desirable objective. In addition, careful consideration would have to be given the important question of the land use pattern to the east of Washington Street.

C. West Houston to 14 Street

The waterfront area opposite the Greenwich Village community offers opportunity for imaginative new development including recreational facilities and the provision of access to the waterfront. New design techniques, comprehensive development and the close collaboration of the community are necessary elements in reaching solutions. It appears evident that any contemplated development must be of a scale large enough to make provision for the trucking and goods-handling activities presently in the area as well as proposed new uses. The possibility of platform construction providing for dual use was mentioned when a portion of this area was proposed for urban renewal in 1961. Strong







community reaction against urban renewal forced the rescission of the designation, however. Aside from a proposal for scattered housing along the west side of Washington Street, no further activity has been undertaken.

Similarly important is the question of the redevelopment potential of the present 14 Street-Gansevoort Meat Market. Should the meat market be relocated to Hunt's Point where an efficient consolidated market function can be housed, the present site could provide for a logical and desirable extension to the Greenwich Village community. The existence of the incinerator at the foot of Gansevoort Street will require careful planning and design for waterfront development in the immediate adjacent areas.

D. Chelsea Piers - 14 Street to 37 Street

The presence of active and recently improved piers along this one-mile stretch of waterfront gives it first priority for cargo handling and freight distribution, with consolidated rail freight terminals provided to the extent necessary in the portion north of 23 Street. ]

Two opportunities for desirable change exist, however. The first of these relates to the often expressed desire of the Chelsea community to break through to the river for recreational purposes. We believe that such a need can be met in the near future through a minimum expenditure of funds in the treatment of a pier not now needed or appropriate for port purposes.



Although the residential community is separated from the waterfront by two long blocks of industrial development, a recreational pier facility could be used intensively on week-ends and holidays when traffic and other activities are at a minimum. The second opportunity involves a request for the use of Pier 64 for the production of motion picture and television films. While such a use appears initially to be inappropriate on the waterfront, the importance of this activity to the economic well-being of the City and to the functioning of the Central Business District clearly outweighs this impression. In addition, the pier involved is too short for modern port needs and it does not appear likely that a conventional port function will use this facility. We strongly recommend that the City give serious consideration to a possible lease arrangement, not involving any major structural change, for the proposed use.

E. West Midtown - 37 Street to 43 Street

This area of the waterfront should be developed for recreational purposes. Improved facilities for sightseeing ships are already under way, and a major convention hall is a suggested improvement that warrants further investigation.

F. 43 Street to 57 Street

This Section should have the highest priority of any program of development on the North River waterfront. The construction of a superliner facility as a major gateway to the City would do



much to introduce new levels of efficiency and amenity to a vital and revenue-producing function. Through imaginative design, and with the provision of such desirable activities as shops, observation decks, restaurants and promenades, a superliner terminal could easily be the precursor of a renaissance of the west side of midtown Manhattan. Necessary improvements to the West Side Highway, including easy access and parking, and a new transit distribution system tying in with the core area are the design objectives.

Funds have already been appropriated and a feasibility study is well under way. It is recommended that necessary approvals and funds be immediately forthcoming if the study recommends a superliner facility.

G. 57 to 72 Street

Future development of this portion of the waterfront is decidedly one of low priority. If and when the proposed Litho City project utilizing the air rights over the New York Central Yards from 60 Street to 70 Street materializes, consideration should be given the provision of waterfront recreational facilities tied into and serving the entire community.



## II. WEST 72 STREET TO SPUYTEN DUYVIL

This almost nine-mile segment of the Hudson River waterfront is devoted almost entirely to park and recreational purposes. These facilities serve not only the recreational needs of the adjacent residential communities, but many of them are intensively used on a community and borough-wide basis. In addition, some sections of this nearly continuous stretch, such as the Cloisters area, Fort Tryon and Inwood Hill Parks, have a regional and even national importance and interest.

The section between 125 Street and 145 Street is one of two gaps in the continuity of park and recreational facilities and results from a past decision on the part of the City to retain existing and non-residential uses. As a result of changing conditions and demands, however, there is now the possibility of meaningful redevelopment of this portion of the waterfront in a manner consistent with its primary recreational potential. There is active interest evidenced in the redevelopment of the area by many local and community groups. The Hunt's Point Market will provide space for the handful of meat dealers now in the area should they decide to move. Careful study is indicated for the balance of the area to determine whether redevelopment is feasible, and if so, to arrive at appropriate design solutions to the problems of grade variations, elevated structures and traffic barriers. City commitment to moderate expenditures for recreational facilities of a non-permanent nature rate as a high priority prospect.





The second gap in the continuity of park and recreational facilities occurs at a point approximately one-half mile south of, and running up to, Dyckman Street. This portion is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Marine and Aviation and has been proposed for combination of housing and marina. In view of the conservation of the natural beauty of the riverway at this point, the relationship to the Cloisters and to Fort Tryon Park, and past efforts to secure this section for park purposes, we strongly recommend that this section be developed for park and recreation use. A marina or a waterfront restaurant would be compatible with the basic recreational function. Because of the strong interest expressed for housing at this site, however, the feasibility of low-rise units which will not impair sight lines and have no other adverse effect might be explored.

From 72 Street northward the Hudson River waterfront of New York City should be preserved in a system of parks and recreation facilities. By closing the two existing gaps and by including New York City, at least as far south as 72 Street and possibly to 60 Street if the park opposite the proposed Litho City development materializes in the proposed national scenic riverway for the Hudson River, the natural beauty of the river valley can be protected and enhanced. Legislation already pending in Congress to make the Hudson River a national scenic riverway from Beacon south to the City line should be amended to extend the designation further south.

*Handwritten note:* "This segment is the City line"



III. HARLEM RIVER - BROADWAY TO CARL SCHURZ PARK

This segment of the waterfront is somewhat longer than the almost nine-mile segment on the Hudson River side of Manhattan because of the bends and turns both the Harlem and East Rivers make. A profusion of uses characterize this waterfront stretch within which some opportunities exist or may arise, principally in the intermediate and long-term future. Extensive development, some of it fairly recent, has already limited the number and scope of opportunities.

Immediately south of Broadway to Dyckman Street the waterfront uses are dominated by a large subway train yard, a Consolidated Edison power plant and a mixture of automotive, industrial and open uses. South of Academy Street some dilapidated boat moorings and shacks occupy a small inlet. Both the Transit Authority yards and the inlet might have potential as sites for residential redevelopment, somewhat hampered only by the proximity of the Consolidated Edison plant. The Consolidated Edison plant is expected to remain indefinitely despite any technological advances in the production and distribution of power, and possibly to require expansion at its present site. The area does have significant potential, however, in the long run. In the meantime the area functions adequately to house necessary service and industrial functions.



From Dyckman Street south to 162 Street the Harlem River Driveway traverses the waterfront, overlooked by Highbridge Park to the west. The Jumel Place Title I project on the Amsterdam Avenue heights will take advantage of the scenic beauty of the park and the open expanse of the Harlem River.

South of Highbridge Park to 125 Street the waterfront is developed with a series of housing projects interspersed with parks and playgrounds. Colonial Houses, the Polo Grounds development of the Housing Authority, Harlem River Houses, the proposed Mitchell-Lama development over the 147 Street subway yards, Lincoln and Riverton Houses alternate with small parks and playgrounds existing or proposed. From 131 Street to 125 Street and west to Park Avenue is the East Harlem Industrial Triangle. Initially proposed for industrial development to provide job opportunities for this section of the City and to utilize unique locational advantages, this area may be recommended for mixed residential and non-residential uses on the basis of studies currently under way on the multi-problem families concentrated here.

From 125 Street south to 84 Street which marks the southern boundary of Carl Schurz Park, the pattern of existing and planned residential developments, parks and playgrounds and institutional uses is similar to that north of 132 Street, with two exceptions. The first of these is the Washburn Wire Works which occupies a three block frontage north of 116 Street. It is expected that this fairly



substantial and well maintained operation, which utilizes the river for goods movement, will continue at this location indefinitely. Should the facility ever move, however, a residential redevelopment opportunity will arise. The other exception is the Municipal Asphalt Plant at 91 Street. An architecturally-pleasing parabolic structure, this facility is expected to remain in operation for some time to come. Because of the relative smallness of its site, a meaningful redevelopment potential would exist only in conjunction with blocks further west now used intensively for service and automotive functions. The problem of space for these activities, however, is becoming one of critical importance as the competition for cheap land accelerates.

This stretch of the waterfront is otherwise developed with Wagner Houses, Benjamin Franklin High School, Jefferson Park, the East River Title I area, East River Houses, the Metro North area, Metropolitan Hospital, Manhattan Vocational High School, Swope Houses, Isaacs Houses and Carl Schurz Park which contains Gracie Mansion, the residence of the Mayor.





IV. CARL SCHURZ PARK TO 34 STREET

This sector of the waterfront is characterized by solid development with private housing, institutional uses, utilities and industrial activities. No redevelopment prospects appear indicated except possibly in the long-term. Two areas of industrial activity at 72 Street and around 39 Street are dominated by Consolidated Edison facilities which, like the previously described facility north of Dyckman Street, are expected to remain indefinitely. The nature and impact of these operations are such that the immediately adjacent areas are better left for the industrial uses (a Department of Sanitation incinerator, garages and warehouses around 72 Street and the Coca-Cola plant, Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity facility and truck freight terminal around 34 Street) which presently utilize these areas. Should the Consolidated Edison facilities ever relocate because of changes in the production and distribution of power, these areas would have to be re-evaluated as potential redevelopment sites. The balance of this sector appears to be fixed for the long-term with such developments as the residential neighborhoods of Sutton Place, Beekman Place, New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, Rockefeller Institute, and the United Nations.



V. BELLEVUE MEDICAL CENTER TO CORLEARS HOOK - 34 STREET TO JACKSON STREET

This segment of waterfront is characterized in much the same manner as the previous three segments with institutional uses, utilities, parks, and residential development. Two short- or possibly intermediate-range possibilities for housing redevelopment and one long-range possibility exist. The two possibilities refer to a section between the bulkhead and pierhead lines opposite Bellevue Hospital and to a similar adjacent section opposite Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town. If problems of access, relationships to adjacent residential areas and supporting community facilities, the proximity of a Consolidated Edison plant, a newly approved heliport and the elevated or to-be-elevated portions of the Drive can be adequately handled, the sites would lend themselves to fully tax-paying housing, with recreational use of the waterfront and access open to all. As previously recommended for the area south of Chambers Street on the Hudson River, a lease arrangement rather than sale of the land is recommended. Present legislation would have to be amended to extend the period of lease from the presently allowable twenty-five years to a period sufficiently long enough to amortize the improvements.

During the hearings on the Bellevue South Urban Renewal Area many opponents urged the development of the waterfront instead of that area. Rather than being a substitute for Bellevue South, any waterfront development should be considered as being complementary to the renewal of that section of the City.



The single long-term prospect that exists is that represented by the Consolidated Edison plant now occupying its original site, the site of the old Eagle Pencil Company and holding the site of the former Willard Parker Hospital for expansion. As in the cases of the three previously discussed facilities along the river operated by Consolidated Edison, long-term availability is based upon technological or economic factors not now evident.

Elsewhere within this sector, Bellevue Hospital, Jacob Riis Houses, Lillian Wald Houses, Baruch Houses, Corlears Hook Houses, Corlears Hook Park and East River Park occupy the waterfront or overlook the waterfront.



## VI. CORLEARS HOOK TO THE BATTERY

The last segment of the Manhattan waterfront running from Jackson Street south consists of two miles, the uncommitted portions of which have the same redevelopment potential as the area south of Chambers Street on the Hudson River, but with a much higher priority.

From Jackson Street to the Brooklyn Bridge the upland has undergone dramatic changes with the construction during the past three decades of Vladeck Houses, Smith Houses, LaGuardia Houses, and Gouverneur Houses. In planning is the Two Bridges Title I project which plans to utilize platform construction to provide space for industrial activities below and residential and ancillary uses above. In this stretch, only the five-story Journal American plant remains as an actual and useful non-residential activity on a single block.

In the Port Report, the City Planning Commission stated that the area south of the Manhattan Bridge presented an opportunity for residential, commercial and recreational development related to the adjacent financial district and to existing and planned residential communities facing on the River. With the exception of two new facilities, the Bowater Paper Company pier and the Belgian Line pier, the balance of the waterfront south of Corlears Hook is deteriorated and is unnecessary for any continued role in the port function.





In view of the on-going study of Lower Manhattan it is felt that specific recommendations are premature at this time. The waterfront here possesses a clear and distinct prospect for desirable residential, commercial and recreational development, and it is anticipated that these prospects will be precised and evaluated in the forthcoming consultants' report and recommendations for Lower Manhattan.

